CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	3 Rivers Communications Granite Creek
Proposed Implementation Date:	Summer 2018
Proponent:	3 Rivers Communications
Location:	Section 36, Township 5 South – Range 3 West (Common School Trust)
County:	Madison County

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

3 Rivers Communications has applied to the MT DNRC, Dillon Unit to provide Fiber to the Home (FTTH) facilities that will cross 1 tract of state land in the Granite Creek area of Madison County. The new (FTTH) facilities would provide telephony, high-speed data, and broadband services to the rural Virginia City area. Currently the rural Virginia City exchange is serviced by ageing copper cables that have reached their useful life limit, preventing 3 Rivers Telephone Coop from being able to fulfill service requests, including full deployment of DSL services. The proposed facilities will be buried fiber optic cables placed within existing cable corridors along state highway or county road rights-of-way both in public rights-of-way and utilizing some private easements. The upgrade comprises approximately 41 miles of new fiber optic cable in Virginia City exchange.

Buried placement of new facilities will be accomplished using plowing, trenching and boring, where appropriate, and for the most part with the use of a vibratory plow drawn by a crawler tractor. The latter process involves insertion of the cable to a depth of 36" to 42" through a temporary surface opening of approximately 6"ins width. This opening is closed and repaired immediately behind the plow following insertion of the cable. All construction will be completed in accordance with RUS procedures and utilizing RUS plans and specifications.

The guide in these matters is the new Montana State Telecommunications Plan as mandated by Rural Utilities Service (RUS), an agency of the Department of Agriculture, and defined in Final Rule 7 CFR Part 1751 entitled, "Telecommunications Systems Planning and Design Criteria and Procedures."

Ground disturbance would be minimal, except for the placing of hand holes at points along the installation route to access the buried cable. Hand holes are a rectangular box approximately 20" tall by 25" wide by 32" long that the traditional phone pedestal sits on. They are buried flush to the ground and provide room under the pedestal to allow access to the fiber-optic cable for splicing or repairs.

The upgrade will allow for clearer communications and make available high-speed internet and digital television service to customers in the area.

The width of the easement over the 1 state tracts would be 20 feet wide, 10 feet each side of centerline and the length is approximately 504,995 feet long and would encompass approximately 1.037 acres of state land. See attached map.

3 Rivers Communications plans to start construction on this project in the summer of 2018.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

Patrick Rennie MT DNRC Archeologist

Madison County Commissioners
MT FWP Wildlife Biologist, Dean Waltee
Montana Natural Heritage Program
MT FWP Fisheries Biologist, Matt Yeager

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

There are no other government agencies with jurisdiction for this proposal.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

A. Action Alternative: Grant 3 Rivers Communications Cooperative a utility easement to bury telecommunications cable in Section 36, Township 5 South- Range 3 West in Madison County.

B. No Action Alternative: Deny 3 Rivers Communications Cooperative a utility easement to bury a telecommunications cable in Section 36, Township 5 South- Range 3 West in Madison County.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:
Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.

The soils located at this site are 135- Tiban very stony loam, 15-45 percent slopes. With a minor component being 94-Oro Fino-Poin complex, 15 to 45 percent slopes. The Tiban soils are gravelly till and or alluvium and or colluvium.

The parent material for the Oro Fino –Poin is loamy colluvium and or residuum weathered from gneiss. Both soil types are well drained and have low production capabilities. Land capability classification for the Tiban soil is 7s and for the Oro-Poin is 7e. These soils are droughty and have moderate erosion potential where they are disturbed. Erosion is controlled by installing standard drainage features and grass seeding where needed. These soils dry out rapidly after snowmelt or rain. Rutting can occur if the soils are worked when they become saturated.

No Action Alternative: No changes to the soil conditions would occur under this alternative.

Action Alternative: Some minor soil disturbance would occur under this alternative. If the telecommunications cable is installed during dry or frozen conditions no long term or cumulative impacts to soils would be anticipated. Disturbed areas will be seeded with grass seed and erosion barriers installed if the need arises.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:
Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.

The East Fork of Granite Creek, a perennial fish bearing stream runs parallel to the existing Granite Creek County Road. The cable will parallel the stream, and then cross it. From there it runs north to the property boundary. Matt Yeager Fisheries biologist with the FWP was scoped for this proposal but did not have concerns with the installation of the underground telecommunications cable. No long term or cumulative impacts are anticipated from the installation of the cable to the East Fork of Granite Creek

No Action Alternative: No changes to water Quality would occur under this alternative.

Action Alternative: minor soil disturbance along the county road could cause short term sediment to end up in the East Fork of Granite Creek, however this would only be during the construction phase of the proposal and no long term or cumulative impacts would be anticipated from this proposal.

6. AIR QUALITY:
What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

This proposed utility easement is in a sparsely populated area. The location currently meets EPA ambient air quality standards and is not located in a class I air shed. The granting of this easement would not cause any long term or cumulative impacts to air quality standards in the Virginia City area.

No Action Alternative: No changes to Air Quality standards would occur if this alternative is chosen.

Action Alternative: during the construction phase of the installation of the telecommunications cable, a small increase in dust particulates in the air will occur. This change in air quality standards would only be short term, and no long term or cumulative effects would be anticipated.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:
What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.

The Montana Natural Heritage Program was scoped for this proposal. There have not been any rare or sensitive plants, or cover types identified with in the project location. The proposal will disturb some of the native vegetation that occurs along the shoulder of the road. However, the corridor has already been disturbed and continues to be disturbed during road maintenance activities. Disturbed areas should be re- seeded with a native grass seed mix. This is steep mountains terrain with Douglas fir and juniper growing on it.

No Action Alternative: No changes to the current vegetative communities would occur under this alternative.

Action Alternative: There would be short term impacts to the current vegetation cover under this alternative however disturbed areas will be re- seeded and the cover will grow back rapidly. There is the possibility of noxious weeds being introduced to the site due to this activity taking place. Mitigation should include washing equipment prior to entering stat land and monitoring and spraying weeds for three years after the project is completed. Following these mitigation measures should reduce the risk of long term or cumulative impacts to vegetation in the project location.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:
Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

The area is used by both large and small mammals, and birds. Large game species include elk, deer, moose, bear and predators. There are many sensitive bird species that can be found in the area along with the possibility of an occasional wolverine passing through. These wildlife species may be disturbed during the construction phase of this proposal but once the underground cable has been installed no long term or cumulative effects to wildlife would be anticipated.

No Action Alternative: No changes to wildlife habitat would occur under this alternative.

Action Alternative: Short term disturbance to wildlife during the construction phase of this proposal may occur however, once the underground powerline is in, very little maintenance or wildlife disturbance will occur due to this alternative.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:
Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

An NRIS search of the area identified, three bird species of concern, Cassin's Finch, Brewers Sparrow, and Clark's Nutcracker. Mammals that were identified include wolverine and fish included West Slope Cutthroat trout.

Brewer's Sparrow (Spizella breweri) – Brewer's sparrow is a BLM sensitive species. According to the Montana Natural Resource Information Service (NRIS), the species prefers nesting in sagebrush averaging 16 inches in height. The proposals location isn't near any sage brush thus use of the area by Brewer's sparrow is limited. The Brewer's sparrow could use the area during certain times of the year; however, the proposed project would not significantly alter the current vegetative community so little impact to the bird is anticipated.

No Action Alternative: No changes to the natural environment would occur to Brewer's Sparrow or their habitat if this alternative is chosen.

Action Alternative: The action alternative should not have any long term, or cumulative effects on Brewer's Sparrow or their habitat. The installation activity may cause some short-term disturbance but the duration of the project will not be long and ground disturbance will be minimal.

Wolverine (Gulo gulo) – Wolverines are listed as sensitive species by both the BLM and USFS. Per Montana Natural Resource Information Service (NRIS) wolverines have been seen within three miles of the proposed easement site. This proposal however has a small foot print and use by wolverines will be intermittent in nature and the proposal should not alter the current existing habitat in the area. No long term or cumulative effects to wolverines, or their habitat are anticipated from this proposal.

No Action Alternative: No changes to the natural environment would occur to Wolverine's or their habitat if this alternative is chosen.

Action Alternative: The action alternative should not have any long term, or cumulative effects on Wolverine's or their habitat. The installation activity may cause some short-term disturbance but the short duration of the project will not have any long term or cumulative effects.

Westslope Cutthroat Trout (Oncorhynchus clarkia lewisi) – Westslope Cutthroat trout are listed by both the USFS and BLM as a sensitive species and a Species of Concern within the State of Montana. Current populations are outside of the direct impact area posed by the proposal. Westslope Cutthroat trout are found in the upper reaches of Mill Gulch Creek, but currently are not present in Granite Creek where the proposal is located. As proposed the project should not cause erosion or stream degradation so no long term or cumulative effects are anticipated from this proposal to Westslope Cutthroat trout.

No Action Alternative: No changes to the natural environment would occur to West Slope Cutthroat trout or their habitat if this alternative is chosen.

Action Alternative: The action alternative should not have any, short term, long term, or cumulative effects on Westslope Cutthroat trout or their habitat.

Cassin's Finch (Haemorhous cassinii) is listed by the state of Montana as an S3, G5 species meaning that it is potentially at risk in Montana due to declining numbers, extent and /or habitat even though it may be abundant in some areas. The birds breeding habitat is coniferous forests in mountainous regions of North America. They move to lower elevations in the winter. These birds forage in trees, and sometimes in ground vegetation. They mainly eat seeds, buds, berries, and some insects. The location of this proposal is in prime habitat for the bird, however the project will not destroy any of the bird's habitats and any long term or cumulative impacts are not anticipated if the action alternative is chosen.

No Action Alternative: No changes to the natural environment would occur to Cassin's Finch or their habitat if this alternative is chosen.

Action Alternative: The action alternative should not have any long term, or cumulative effects on Cassin's Finch or their habitat. The installation activity may cause some short-term disturbance, but the duration of the project will not be long, and the amount of ground disturbance will be minimal.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:
Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to cultural, Historical or archeological sites would occur under this alternative.

Action Alternative: A Class III intensity level cultural and paleontological resources inventory was conducted of the area of potential effect on state land. Despite a detailed examination, no cultural or fossil resources were identified and no additional archaeological or paleontological investigative work is recommended. The proposed project will have *No Effect* to *Antiquities* as defined under the Montana State Antiquities Act. A formal report of findings has been prepared and is on file with the DNRC and the Montana State Historic Preservation Office.

However, if previously unknown cultural or paleontological materials are identified during project related activities, all work will cease until a professional assessment of such resources can be made.

11. AESTHETICS:
Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.

This proposal will install a new buried underground telecommunications cable. The project would improve aesthetics with little new disturbance to the area. The line will be a buried cable with very little disturbance.

No Action Alternative: No changes to aesthetics would occur under this alternative.

Action Alternative: some ground disturbance would occur under this alternative.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:
Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.

No demands for additional environmental resources are required for this project. No cumulative effects to environmental resources should result from either of the proposed alternatives.

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:
List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

No other studies, plans, or projects were identified in this area during the scoping for this proposal. Neither of the proposed alternatives will impact other environmental documents pertinent to this proposal.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

This project will take place along a public right-of- way, the Granite Creek County Road. Although the road sustains minimal use due to its remote location, it does receive some travel by the public. To complete the project 3 Rivers Communications will need to have heavy equipment on a steep winding road with poor sight distances which could cause safety concerns to the public. The project will require signage and possibly flagmen.

No Action Alternative: Health and safety risks will remain the same under this alternative.

Action Alternative: The action alternative could cause some safety risks to the public if chosen. Mitigation may include flagmen and signage at the construction site.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

No Action Alternative: No changes to agricultural activities would occur if this alternative is chosen.

Action Alternative: The installation of the telecommunications cable could have some short-term effects on cattle grazing if the cable is put in while livestock are present on the lease, however no long term or cumulative effects to agricultural activities are anticipated.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

Neither of the proposed alternatives will create nor eliminate permanent jobs in the area.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

Neither of the proposed alternatives will increase tax revenues nor result in an increase or decrease of the tax base.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:

Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services.

No increased demand for government services are expected because of either of the proposed alternatives.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:

List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

There currently aren't any locally adopted environmental plans and goals that DNRC is aware of in this area. The Madison County Commissioners and the County Planner were both scoped for this proposal, and no comments were received regarding the project.

No Action Alternative: No changes would occur under this alternative.

Action Alternative: This alternative would not affect locally adopted environmental plans or goals.

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:
Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

Neither of the proposed alternatives will affect, nor alter recreational activities in the area.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:
Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.

Neither of the proposed alternatives will affect distribution of population or housing in the Virginia City area. area.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:
Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

Neither of the proposed alternatives will affect social structures or mores of the surrounding area.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:
How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

Neither of the proposed alternatives will affect cultural uniqueness and diversity of the area.

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:
Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

No Action Alternative: There would be no revenue generate to the trust under this alternative.

Action Alternative: The estimated return to the trust would be $829.00 to the common school trust if the action alternative is chosen.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:**	Timothy Egan	**Date:**	5/1/2018
	Title:	Dillon Unit Manager		

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Grant 3 Rivers Communications Cooperative a utility easement to bury telecommunications cable in Section 36, Township 5 South- Range 3 West in Madison County.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

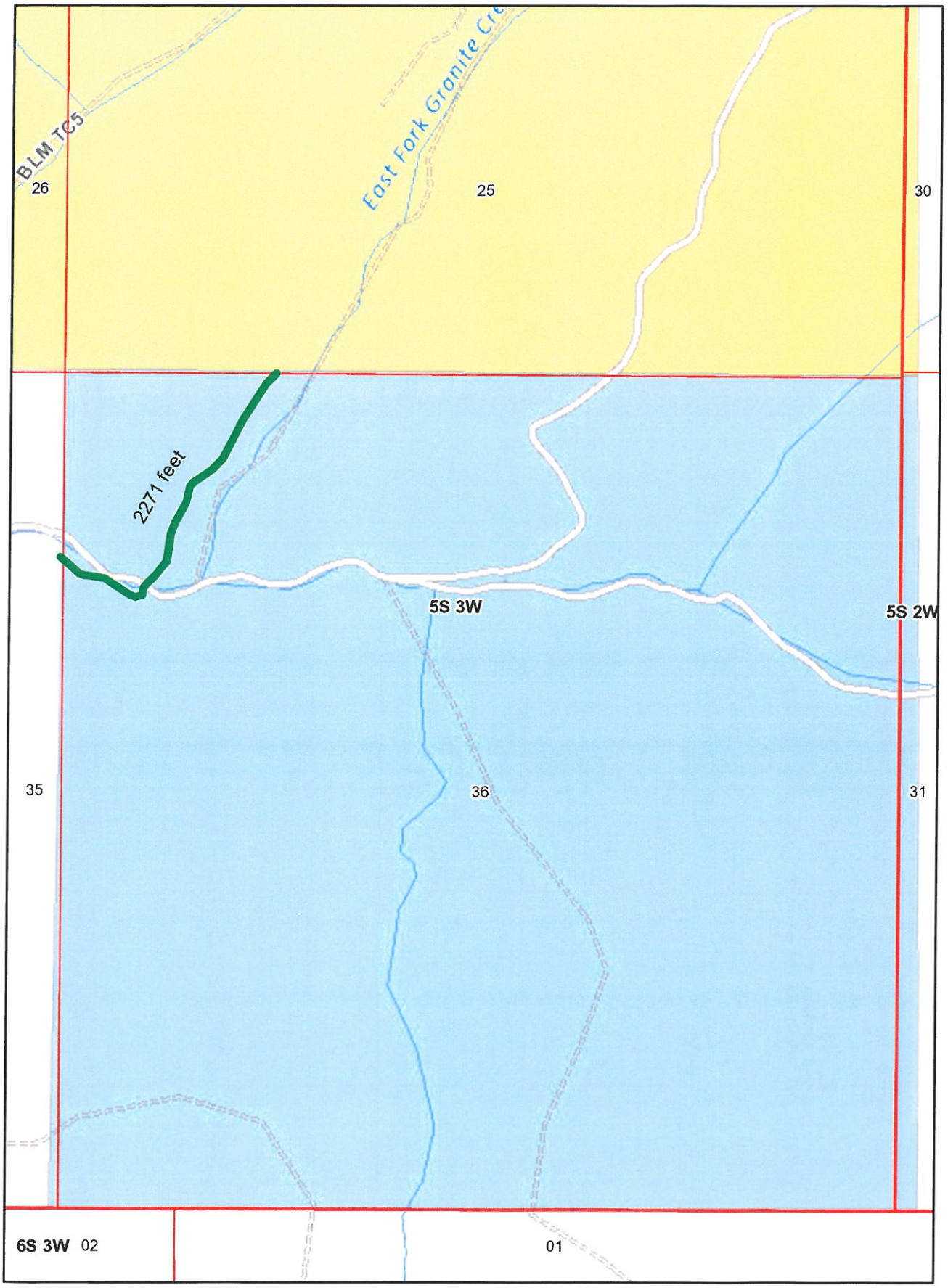
No significant impacts anticipated.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

[ ]	EIS	[ ]	More Detailed EA	[X]	No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:** Martin Balukas **Title:** CLO Trust Land Program Manager	
Signature:		**Date:** 5/7/18

Proposed Utility Easment - 3 Rivers Communications
T5S, R3W, Section 36



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